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in Palestine

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“Render unto Caesar”

RELIGIOUS AND
POLITICAL LOYALTY IN
PALESTINE

by

HERBERT LOEWE

*Reader in Rabbis in the
University of Cambridge*

Honorary Fellow of Queens' College

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Dedicated
to the memory of
CLAUDE JOSEPH GOLDSMID MONTEFIORE
who rendered to God and to Caesar
what was their due

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[More information](#)

λέγω ὅτι τῷ θεῷ ἀπειθεῖν . . . ἀδύνατον.

PLATO, *Ap.* 38A

ἀλλ' ὃν πόλις στήσειε, τοῦδε χρῆ κλύειν
καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάναντία.

SOPHOCLES, *Ant.* 666–7

*My son, fear thou the LORD and the king:
And meddle not with them that are given to change.*

PROV. XXIV, 21

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[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> IX
<i>Summary</i>	XIII
"Render unto Caesar"	I
A. The loyalty of the Jews and Rabbinic teaching	4
B. The question of tribute	38
C. The coin symbol and the action which Jesus took	65
D. Evaluation of material cited and con- clusions to be drawn	107
<i>List of Abbreviations and Editions used</i>	117
<i>Index</i>	119
<i>List of Passages cited</i>	131
<i>Greek Index</i>	135
<i>Hebrew Index</i>	136
Plate A (Eastern Coins)	<i>facing page</i> 140
Plate B (Western Coins)	,, 141

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

As a result of the abdication of King Edward VIII, of the Coronation of King George VI, of the Oxford Oecumenical Congress, and of the attention which European politics have drawn to the relation of Church to State, these lectures were given at Cambridge, and, subsequently, in London, to the Society of Jews and Christians. They have been slightly revised and expanded for publication, in accordance with the desire of certain friends who heard them delivered and who considered that their interest was more than ephemeral. In this process of revision, allusions to contemporary events have now been eliminated. Such parallels, though striking and illuminating, serve appropriately as illustrations to the spoken word and enable hearers to relate the past to the present. But when, after some time has elapsed, a lecture is published, such references tend soon to become obsolete, especially in these days when the pace of events is so swift. Nevertheless, readers of these pages will not fail to notice many coincidences between ancient and modern history. The ideal king of Deuteronomy was to be a brother to his subjects and to read daily in the Law of the LORD. King George V, in his last broadcast to the Empire, referred to himself, with great humility but

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Frontmatter

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with great truth, as the father of a family. Of him it is recorded that he read a portion of the Bible morning and evening. The ideal king is urged in Deuteronomy to abstain from polygamy, lest his wives turn away his heart from God. And Rabbinic exegesis extended this admonition to monogamy: the ideal king must not marry an unsuitable wife. It was the question of marriage that caused the abdication of Edward VIII. The attitude ascribed to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, of giving unswerving loyalty to the king in all lawful commands, but of resisting to the death his behest to apostatise, is identical with that of Niemöller and countless brave Christians in Germany and Austria. And finally, over the interpretation of "lawful commands", a wide cleavage of opinion existed, until recently, among good men, as the difference between the standpoints of the Bishops of Chichester and Gloucester clearly testified. But this cleavage has ceased to exist since Czechoslovakia has been annexed by Germany. Just as, in the time of Jesus, there were those who held sincerely that Roman coins might legitimately be used and that tribute might be paid, while others, for conscience' sake, held opposite views, so, prior to the suppression of Czech independence, there was a conflict over the attitude to be adopted towards the authoritarian states. These and many similar analogies will easily recur to the reader of these papers.

It need hardly be stated that in writing this essay every effort has been made to avoid apologetics.

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Frontmatter

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There are two fundamental questions on which the writer has endeavoured, to the best of his ability, to preserve impartiality and to present both sides. First, there is the general question of the loyalty of the subject to his earthly ruler. Is this loyalty unlimited? Who is to determine when it conflicts with duty to God? When is it right to refuse obedience? Who is to judge whether a command is legitimate or whether obedience to it involves apostasy? Secondly, there is the more particular question of Jewish loyalty to Rome. Here it is not asserted that Jews were always loyal or always disloyal. Both aspects are not infrequently overstressed. It is sought to show that disloyalty—unless apostasy was involved—was a repudiation of biblical and Rabbinic teaching and that, in practice, the Jews were neither more nor less disloyal to Rome than others were. It has not been deemed necessary to enumerate every disturbance related by Josephus. To do so would have required a careful examination of each instance, an investigation of its extent, whether individual or general, and an appraisal of its causes, in order to decide whether it was prompted by sedition to Caesar or fidelity to God. It has been deemed more satisfactory to trace the line of Rabbinic teaching before and after the time of Jesus and to show that in this teaching there runs a continuous line, a line which is analogous to that of Jesus in the parable which provides the title to this essay. Some of the evidence, therefore, is earlier and some later than his

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

day. But it will be observed that it is uniform in this respect. To demonstrate this uniformity is the main purpose of these papers.

I am indebted to Professor S. Krauss, Canon A. Lukyn Williams, D.D., Mr Charlesworth and Mr Seltman for friendly help and criticism. To the scholar who read the typescript when it was submitted to the Syndics, my gratitude is due for the changes which he suggested.

Attention must be drawn to the lucid and exhaustive survey of taxation in Palestine by Dr F. M. Heichelheim, in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, vol. iv, "Roman Syria" (edited by Tenney Frank), as well as to his *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Altertums* . . . (Leyden, 1938): to my regret these important works appeared too late for me to utilise. The same applies to Martin Rist's learned article in *The Journal of Religion*, xvi, no. 3, July 1936 (Chicago), in which he investigates the parable from the standpoint of Form Criticism.

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July 1939

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[More information](#)

SUMMARY

(1) The touching parable of the coin and the highly significant phrase "Render unto Caesar" call for fresh examination for two reasons: first, because of political circumstances to-day; secondly, because the action and teaching of Jesus would seem sometimes to be misinterpreted.

(2) It is frequently asserted that, by inculcating loyalty to the State, Jesus broke with Jewish tradition. This is incorrect, as an investigation of the tradition would seek to establish on the basis of evidence.

(3) The parable would, apparently, deal only with cases where the State is either favourable or indifferent to the religion of the individual. How is the parable to be explained if the State demands apostasy?

(4) If the parable were concerned merely with the duty of the subject towards a virtuous ruler, no conflict of conscience would arise. Clearly, Jesus was concerned with an important principle of conduct, a burning issue of everyday life; he was not demonstrating a self-evident truism.

(5) This issue may have been over the payment of a particular impost which either had, or could be deemed to have, idolatrous associations. Such a possibility exists, but there is another, which this study would suggest. For the question of imposts had often been discussed and

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

rulings existed. There was, however, another question which aroused controversy, and it may be that this formed the subject of the parable, i.e. the association of coins with idolatry.

(6) In the time of Jesus the coin was a more important political symbol than it is to-day when, owing to the credit system, less money passes from hand to hand than formerly.

(7) Certain emblems on coins were definitely regarded as idolatrous, and some saints went so far as to refuse even to "gaze upon" them: others felt that such coins might be used without offence to God.

(8) To-day it is difficult to regard such a difference of opinion as real: it seems mere hair-splitting and sophistry. But evidence shows that the coin had become elevated to a symbol, and symbols necessarily stand for more than their intrinsic value.

(9) The significance of this controversy demands more recognition than it has received hitherto. Did the use of heathen money involve treachery to God? Did the mere handling of a coin imply a recognition of the idol or deified emperor whose emblem it bore? Or was such usage harmless and irrelevant so far as loyalty to God was concerned?

(10) With the latter view Jesus sided. On the question of tribute his action is not altogether clear, but, on the whole, he seems to have been in favour of paying it.

(11) His declaration "Render unto Caesar" was not an innovation but in complete harmony with Rabbinic

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teaching: it was a repudiation of the opposing view, possibly put forward by *agents provocateurs*: such a view was Zealot, not Pharisaic.

(12) The wording in the Gospel suggests the possibility that “to gaze upon the face of a coin” (not “upon the faces of men”) may have been the original reading, misunderstood in later times when the whole controversy was forgotten and meaningless, and when hostility between the Synagogue and the Jewish Christians was acute.

(13) Possibly Jesus drove home his parable by turning the coin so as to display the head of Caesar and conceal any idolatrous emblem depicted on the reverse.

(14) The situation in totalitarian states to-day affords a close parallel to the conditions under which Jesus spoke.